My Favourite Things

Object Preferences
in Medieval and Early Modern
Material Culture

edited by

Gerhard Jaritz and Ingrid Matschinegg

LIT

Cover Illustration:
Annunciation (detail), Master of Maria am Gestade,
panel of a winged altarpiece, 1460s.
Vienna, church of Maria am Gestade
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Some Like It Hot:*

Piquant Taste between the Middle Ages and Modern Times

> Why has Tabasco Sauce become so popular the world over? It's simple: put it on any food you like, and it'll make you like it even more! Because Tabasco Sauce brings out a food's flavor while adding a peppery punch of its own. Splash it on everything from Mexican food to Italian, seafood to sandwich spreads, Eggs Benedict to Bloody Marys![1]

Such instructions for use combined with the fact that hot sauces constitute a separate category of contemporary food products suggest that there is a widespread tendency to make any savory dish (or even drink) spicy. Many people prefer almost everything like this, and not only individuals: hot or spicy is a distinctive feature of several kinds of ethnic food from Mexican to Indian as well.

The excessive use of spices – in the sense of exotic condiments imported to Europe from faraway lands – frequently appears as a hallmark of the Middle Ages as well. In the formulation of Wolfgang Schivelbusch, "[p]repared foods were virtually buried under spices; food was little more than a vehicle for condiments which were used in combinations we nowadays would consider quite bizarre."[2] Major narratives of the transition between the medieval and the modern in terms of food preferences point to the drop in the use of spices as one of the emblematic areas of change. This drop is usually explained with reference to the declining prestige of these exotic ingredients as objects of conspicuous consumption following the Portuguese exploration of the sea route leading to their South Asian places of cultivation.[3] Some connect the previous suitability of spices for showing off to

* This article is based on research I made at the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel, with a grant by the Federal State of Lower Saxony, and at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, with the support of the Herodotus Fund. If not indicated otherwise, all translations and emendations of the quoted sources are mine.

1 http://www.tabasco.com/tabasco-products/sauces/tabasco-original-red-sauce (last accessed 2 October 2018).

2 Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise: A Social History of Spices, Stimulants, and Intoxicants*, trans. David Jacobson (New York: Vintage, 1993), 4.

3 Stephen Mennell sees in spices a barrier to further "social competition through the kitchen and the table" because through them "dishes became rather undifferentiated and broadly 'tasted the

their high price: "When spices began to fall in price and to appear on all tables, so that they were no longer a symbol of wealth and luxury," writes Fernand Braudel, "they were used less and their prestige declined."[4] Others point to a process of disenchantment, to the stripping of the spices of their mythic origins which made them highly desirable in the Middle Ages.[5]

Whichever is the case, the same discovery that made spices cheaper and less exotic – combined with that of Columbus on the other side of the globe – led to the diffusion of the chili pepper in Asia and, thus, made possible the emergence of distinctively hot cuisines there.[6] Moreover, it is the recent popularity of Asian and South American ethnic foods that has brought the spicy back to mainstream Western culinary taste after the limited success of chili in some areas of Europe – including Calabria, Hungary, and the Balkans – and among some higher status British diners, as an ingredient of *curry*, in the colonial era.[7]

When the chili first came to Europe, with Columbus himself, the Old World was still very much favorable to spices. The aim of this paper is to understand how

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same'." It seems to me, however, that his explanation also presupposes the loss of their previous value which had made spices appropriate instruments of social competition in the Middle Ages. See Stephen Mennell, *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 54. To my knowledge it is only Rachel Laudan who attributes the decline of the spicy to a factor entirely unrelated to conspicuous consumption and the geographical discoveries, namely new (Paracelsian) ideas of digestion and health. See her "A Kind of Chemistry," *Petits Propos Culinaires* 62 (1999): 8–22.

[4] Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century*, vol. 1: *The Structure of Everyday Life: The Limits of the Possible*, trans. Miriam Kochan and Siân Reynolds (London: Collins, 1981), 221. To be sure, declining overall prices do not necessarily imply loss of appeal in showing status, since more equal access to (former) luxuries can also lead to their re-stratification in terms of quality from "premium" to "economy". Paul Freedman, *Out of the East: Spices and the Medieval Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 221, makes a similar point about English tea culture.

[5] Bruno Laurioux, *Une histoire culinaire du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Champion, 2005), 197–211; Freedman, *Out of the East*, 225.

[6] On the global spread of the chili, see Jean Andrews, *The Pepper Trail: History and Recipes from Around the World* (Denton: The University of North Texas Press, 1999), 3–33; Clifford A. Wright, "The Medieval Spice Trade and the Diffusion of the Chile," *Gastronomica* 2 (2007): 35–43; Sucheta Mazumdar, "The Impact of New World Food Crops on the Diet and Economy of China and India, 1600–1900," in *Food in Global History*, ed. Raymond Grew (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1999), 58–78.

[7] For the fate of the chili in Calabria, Hungary, and the Balkans, see Vito Teti, *Storia del peperoncino: Cibi, simboli e culture tra Mediterraneo e mondo*, 2nd ed., Virgola 118 (Rome: Donizelli, 2015); László Kőszegi, "A paprika útjai Közép-Európába – a kibővült kutatási lehetőségek tükrében" [Routes of paprika to Central Europe – in the light of new research possibilities], *Ethnographia* 123 (2012): 255–77; Gabriella Schubert, "'Pfeffer' und 'Paprika' im Südosten Europas: Eine sprach- und kulturhistorische Betrachtung," *Zeitschrift für Balkanologie* 28 (1992): 104–30 (I am grateful to Snežana Petrovic of the Serbian Academy of Sciences for this reference); and Sándor Bálint, *A szegedi paprika* [The paprika of Szeged] (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1962). For the curry, see Lizzie Collingham, *Curry: A Tale of Cooks and Conquerors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); and Stephanie R. Maroney, "To Make a Curry the India Way: Tracking the Meaning of Curry across Eighteenth-Century Communities," *Food and Foodways* 19 (2011): 122–34.

Europeans received it, why they received it like that, and to what extent were their reactions different from its "post-modern" appreciation today. In the first section, I will explore the immediate context in which chili was perceived by sixteenth-century Europeans, namely the consumption of pepper and other hot spices in the Late Middle Ages. In the second section, I will survey the earliest references to chili until the end of the sixteenth century, and reconstruct a pattern of its reception in terms of regional and social differences and their links to mediaeval taste.

Pepper and Its Cognates in the Late Middle Ages

The two main types of sources through which historians have studied in a systematic fashion the consumption of spices (as more or less separate or separable from their commerce) are *cookbooks* and *household accounts*. Both take various forms which, nevertheless, have the same function, that is, recording and transmitting culinary recipes in the one and everyday expenditures in the other case.[8] Both types of sources have their own biases.

As to household accounts, here the problems are connected, first of all, to the fact that spices can be preserved for long; thus if we do not have all years covered for an extended period of time, we do not know for how long given amounts of spices purchased at one time lasted. Additionally, we tend to ignore for how many persons it was bought, not to mention the exact purposes of its purchase. Was it for flavouring food or colouring it? For making candies, perfumes, or medicines? Was it entirely for the use of the household in question or for giving away as gifts to outsiders as well?

A rare example where most of these unknowns are known is an ordinance of Humbert II, the last Dauphin of the Viennois, for provisioning the house of his mother, Beatrice of Hungary, in his absence for war in 1345. It is not a balance drawn after having made the relevant purchases but a plan of how to make them, that is not an account in the strict sense. Nevertheless, such a plan must have taken into consideration the accounts of previous years in order to be realistic, even if we can suppose that such a high-standing aristocrat as Humbert wanted to avoid running out of foodstuffs and, thus, he ordered to buy more than what seemed necessary.

The document lists the members of Beatrice's household by function, altogether thirty, and then specifies that the following is "necessary for the said Lady, our mother, together with the aforesaid persons and some thirteen [more] each

[8] See Christopher Dyer, "Do Household Accounts Provide an Accurate Picture of Late Medieval Diet and Food Culture?," in *La vie matérielle au Moyen Âge: L'apport des sources littéraires, normative et de la pratique; Actes du colloque de Louvain-la-Neuve, 3–5 octobre 1996*, ed. Emmanuelle Rassart-Eeckhout et al., Publications de l'Institut d'Études Médiévales: Textes, études, congrès 18 (Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut d'Études médiévales de l'Université catholique de Louvain, 1997), 109–25; and Bruno Laurioux, *Les livres de cuisine médiévaux*, Typologie des sources du Moyen Âge occidental 77 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997).

year."[9] In other words, the yearly provisions are calculated for ca. 43 persons which include the members of the household plus others who may be guests or local paupers or both. Of pepper, ginger, and other spices it orders to buy ca. 37 kg for them, that is, ca. 0.86 kg per person.[10] Since candied spices are ordered separately, without specifying the quantity but arranging for it almost the same amount of money as for the spices themselves,[11] we can assume that the latter item was not for making candies and, possibly, not even for making medicine; nothing indicates, however, that it was not used for making perfumes, apart from cooking.

But, at any rate, is 0.86 kg per person per year very much? In the USA, the *per capita availability* of spices in 2015 was ca. 1.7 kg (3.7 lbs);[12] food waste in the USA is estimated at 30–40%,[13] which means that ca. 1–1.2 kg of the amount available per capita was actually consumed. Moreover, modern statistics of spice consumption do not include sugar because today sugar does not count as spice. It was not the case in the Middle Ages, however. Thus, if the spice provisions of the household of Beatrice of Hungary contained sugar as well, then the figure of 0.86 kg per person per year must have been doubly over-calculated from our perspective: once for aristocratic generosity and once for including sugar.

Cookbooks are even vaguer on quantities than household accounts. Dosage was apparently not regarded as a necessary part of the recipe as such; rather, it was seen as something that depended on the taste and medical characteristics of the persons for whom a dish was made. And what was true of main ingredients, it was all the more so of spices, the dosage of which – with regard to salt and pepper at least – even modern cookbooks tend to entrust to the cook (cf. "add salt and pepper to taste"). As a consequence, cookbooks are more informative about typical combinations of flavours and the popularity of specific spices in those mainly aristocratic milieus from which the recipes originated, than about quantities used.

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[9] "Summa dictarum personarum in numero, inclusa Domina: XXX. Extimantes esse necessaria pro dicta Domina matre nostra cum personis praedictis et trezena quolibet anno, videlicet..." Jean-Pierre Moret de Bourchenu, marquis de Valbonnais, *Histoire de Dauphiné et des princes qui ont porté le nom de dauphins*, 2 vols (Geneva: Fabri et Barillot, 1722), 2:519 (with slightly different punctuation). For the interpretation of the word *trezena*, see the editor's note, ibid., 523.

[10] "De speciebus piperis, gingiberis, et aliarum per annum circa unum quintale, valent: LXVI. flor. VIII. gross." Ibid. I have relied on the exchange rate between quintals and kilograms given in Laurioux, *Une histoire culinaire*, 195n. Laurioux (ibid., 194–95) calculates the per capita ratio for thirty persons, not considering the *trezena* (see the quotation in note 9 above).

[11] "Pro confectibus specierum per ann. L. flor." Valbonnais, *Histoire de Dauphiné* 2, 519.

[12] "Coffee, tea, cocoa, and spices," in *Food Availability (Per Capita) Data System*, USDA, Economic Research System, www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-availability-per-capita-data-system (last accessed 2 October 2018).

[13] USDA, Office of the Chief Economist, http://www.usda.gov/oce/foodwaste/faqs.htm (last accessed 2 October 2018). In 1966, the per capita availability of spices was only 0.54 kg (1.2 lbs) and it has grown constantly ever since; on the other hand, in 1966 the rate of food waste must have been much lower too.

Recipes of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries contain altogether a dozen and a half different spices: cardamom, cassia, cinnamon, cloves, coriander, cubeb (*piper cubeba*), cumin, curcuma, galangal, ginger, grains of paradise (melegueta pepper), mace, nutmeg, black and white pepper (*piper nigrum*), long pepper (*piper longum*), saffron, spikenard, and sugar.[14] Some of them (cubeb, grains of paradise, black and white pepper, long pepper) were hot, some (galangal and ginger) only if uncooked, others not at all. "Spicyness" or "hotness" is sometimes recommended explicitly in medieval recipes, implying that it was not the rule. An Anglo-Norman recipe collection written around 1300, for example, writes about a dish made with cloves, mace and cubebs that "let it taste strongly with spices" (*qu'il savoure bien d'espices*), or about another one made with cloves and cubebs that "it should be hot" (*doit estre chaud*).[15]

One of the advantages of cookbooks as historical sources is that they permit statistical comparisons of recipes in terms of the relative frequency of their ingredients and thus help revealing some of the underlying culinary preferences. If, relying on the data gathered by Bruno Laurioux, we compare the frequency of regular pepper, melegueta pepper and saffron in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century recipe collections from different regions of Europe we can observe some interesting regional patterns in cooking for high-status diners (see table 1).[16]

Recipe collections	Regular pepper	Grains of paradise	Saffron
French (N=11)	13 (0–45; 17)	19 (0–68; 19)	23 (14–39; 9)
English (N=15)	21 (0–38; 11)	2 (0–8; 2)	38 (12–69;12)
Iberian (N=3)	20 (13–22; 5)	2 (0–3; 2)	17 (14–20; 3)
German and North European (N=10)	17 (2–37; 12)	2 (0–17; 5)	19 (0–39; 12)
Italian (N=14)	12 (3–22; 6)	2 (0–4; 1)	33 (16–64; 13)

Table 1: Frequency of selected spices in medieval cookbooks from different regions of Europe (average percentage of recipes containing the spice in question with range and standard deviation, all rounded up to integers; source: see note 16)

The Iberian figures based on limited evidence may not be relevant, but the frequencies of regular pepper in French, English, as well as German and North European cookbooks are characterized by wide range and high standard deviation suggesting big differences between the cooks who compiled these collections:

[14] Laurioux, *Une histoire culinaire*, 158–60.

[15] Constance B. Hieatt, "Medieval Britain," in *Regional Cuisines of Medieval Europe: A Book of Essays*, ed. Melitta Weiss Adamson (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 19–45, at 26 and 37.

[16] Laurioux, *Une histoire culinaire*, 443–50. Laurioux analyzes the data differently.

some of them recommended the use of pepper in a large part of the dishes described, while others only in a small part. This result can be compared to Helmut Klug's finding in his study of another corpus of German cookbooks concerning their flavouring practice that regular pepper is mentioned in merely 10% of all recipes but the generic term *würze* occurs in 40% of them; the referents of *würze* may or may not have included pepper depending on the circumstances in which the meals were prepared.[17] Following this lead, it may be possible to explain (away) the big intra-regional differences in Laurioux's data by supposing that cookbooks with low frequencies of pepper only indicate it among the ingredients when it was deemed necessary but it could still be added to other meals as well.

Another possible explanation is that pepper was a divisive spice among high-status diners in, at least, some areas of Europe. In France, for example, grains of paradise show a higher level of average use with similarly big differences between cookbooks, while saffron was even more frequent with much lower differences. In England saffron is strongly preferred to pepper with limited consistency, while grains of paradise are consistently disliked. Elites of Germany and Northern Europe – as far as Laurioux's data is concerned – were moderately enthusiastic about both pepper and saffron with significant intra-regional differences, and uniformly indifferent about grains of paradise. Their Italian counterparts had consistently low interest in regular pepper (and even lower and even more consistently in grains of paradise) but tended to appreciate saffron very much albeit with major disagreements between recipe collections. In general, saffron seems to have been a more popular and less divisive spice than regular (let alone melegueta) pepper. Considered that saffron is far stronger in colour than in taste, the use of spices in the kitchen may have been aimed more at making food *look* attractive than *feel* pungent.[18]

A major implication of these statistics is that inter- and intra-regional differences in the recommended use of (these) spices are too big for permitting the reconstruction of long-term changes – on the basis of recipes, at least. Household accounts, however, if they are interrogated not for the quantities consumed but for the selection of spices purchased, show declining interest in pepper in the French elite, parallel to an increasing penchant for *grain de paradis* also prized by a number of French cooks, as we have seen above.[19] Saffron purchases of French aristocratic households were also plummeting in the course of the fifteenth century but

[17] Helmut W. Klug, "*gewürcz wol vnd versalcz nicht*: Auf der Suche nach skalaren Erklärungsmodellen zur Verwendung von Gewürzen in mittelalterlichen Kochrezepten," *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* 61 (2010): 56–83, at 80.

[18] Cf. Christopher Woolgar, "Fast and Feast: Conspicuous Consumption and the Diet of the Nobility in the Fifteenth Century," in *Revolution and Consumption in Late Medieval England*, ed. Michael Hicks (Woodbridge UK and Rochester NY: Boydell, 2001), 7–25, at 20–22; Klug, "*gewürcz wol vnd versalcz nicht*," 70–74.

[19] Laurioux, *Une histoire culinaire*, 187–88. Its popularity in the French elite can be traced in toll registers as well (ibid., 287n).

whereas the retreat of pepper was accompanied by its democratization, that of the saffron witnessed its mounting price.[20]

Much of these changes, of course, cannot be studied on the basis of household accounts alone; the latter need to be supplemented by scattered references in various other sources and, more systematically, by documents of the spice trade. From the thirteenth century onwards, we can see pepper appearing in social contexts well below the elites like colleges of students in Trets (Provence) and Toulouse, a military garrison in Edinburgh, a hospital in Neubourg (Normandy), or even among peasants and artisans in Montauban.[21] A medical commentary composed in Leuven around 1480 and falsely attributed to Arnau de Vilanova calls pepper-sauce "the sauce of peasants," and adds that "[t]hey, indeed, mix pepper-sauce with beans and peas."[22] On the other hand, no similar evidence for a tendency towards democratization is known to me from Central and Northern Europe. Given the low level of European market integration (measured by price correlations between various local markets) in the fifteenth century, and the dependence of price differences on geographical distance as demonstrated by Kevin O'Rourke and Jeffrey Williamson,[23] pepper may have remained less accessible to those on the lower rungs of the social ladder in much of the German-speaking areas, and the Kingdoms of Poland and Hungary; or, levels of accessibility may well have been quite patchy everywhere, depending very much on one's location even in France which offers most of the evidence of democratization analyzed in the literature so far.

All these difficulties in the source material notwithstanding there remains the fact that Europe's pepper imports were growing incessantly throughout the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries and, according to C. H. H. Wake, more so before ca. 1500 than afterwards. Moreover, the spice trade in general, and that of the expensive Moluccan spices (nutmeg, mace, cloves) in particular, grew much more than pepper imports already before Vasco da Gama's discovery of the sea route to

[20] Ibid., 187.

[21] Ibid., 190.

[22] "[P]onuntur quinque ex quibus potest fieri salsamentum. [...] Tertium est piper et est salsamentum rusticorum. Commiscent enim piper cum fabis et pisis." *Commentum Arnaldi de Villa Nova super Regimen Salernitanum*, in Arnau de Vilanova, *Opera nuperrime recognita ac emendata* (Venice: Scotus, 1505), fols. 150a–72d, at fol. 157r. Cf. Laurioux, *Une histoire culinaire*, 191; Freedman, *Out of the East*, 43; and Ernest Wickersheimer, "Autour du Régime de Salerne," *Le Scalpel* 50 (1952): 1–12.

[23] Kevin H. O'Rourke and Jeffrey G. Williamson, "Did Vasco da Gama Matter to European Markets?" *Economic History Review* 62 (2009): 655–84.

India,[24] suggesting that elites were shifting their resources from pepper to finer spices less associated with low-status consumers.[25]

Unfortunately, quantities of spices for sale in fifteenth-century Europe can be known from ports of entry (Venice, Genoa, Barcelona) alone, thus it seems impossible to know the ratios of distribution between different parts of the continent. For the sixteenth century, however, we have estimates to this effect from two insiders of the trade, the Augsburg merchant Konrad Rott, and the consul of the Hanseatic League in Lisbon, Hans Kampferbek. According to them, most of the pepper imported by the Portuguese ended up in Central and Northern Europe, and the least of it went to the Hispanic Peninsula.[26] If the supposed trend towards democratization in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is correct, then the main European consumers of pepper after ca. 1500 must have been below-the-elite social groups residing in German-speaking areas and some of the surrounding territories.

Where does chili, the new hot spice from America, fit in this picture of democratization and regional difference? Who were most interested in it? Those in the North or those in the South? Those high on the social ladder or those below them?

The Arrival of the Chili

In the accounts of his first voyage, one of the most important issues discussed by Christopher Columbus was the economic use of the islands discovered by him. In his letter to the "most Christian and lofty and powerful sovereigns" of 4 March 1493, he mentions "spicery of a certain pepper to fill as many ships as Your Highnesses may order to be loaded."[27] Earlier in the same text he also gives the local Taino name of this "certain pepper" as *agí*, while in his letter to the Chancellor of

[24] "[T]he increase in pepper imports was at most about 64% in the fifteenth century, and more likely under 45% (as against upwards of 177% for spices), and about 27% in the sixteenth century. What the pattern for the spice trade as a whole was for the sixteenth century is not known, though […] the trade in Moluccan spices […] appears to have grown as much as 500% between 1500 and 1620." C. H. H. Wake, "The Changing Pattern of Europe's Pepper and Spice Imports, ca. 1400–1700," *The Journal of European Economic History* 8 (1979): 361–403, at 392.

[25] The real (grain-deflated) price of both pepper and the fine spices was declining all over Europe after the Portuguese's joining the trade. See O'Rourke and Williamson, "Did Vasco da Gama Matter," 667–69.

[26] Hermann Kellenbenz, "Autour de 1600: Le commerce du poivre des Fugger et le marché international du poivre," *Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 11 (1956): 1–28, at 7–11; Stefan Halikowski Smith, "Demystifying a Change in Taste: Spices, Space, and Social Hierarchy in Europe, 1380–1750," *The International History Review* 29 (2007): 237–57, at 241–42.

[27] "Espeçería de una pimienta, quantas naos Vuestras Altezas mandaren cargar y almastiga quanta mandaren cargar." The letter is edited and translated in Margarita Zamora, *Reading Columbus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 181–97; the quotations are from pp. 186 (Spanish) and 194 (English).

the Exchequer of Aragon, Luís de Santángel, he relates about the islanders that they endure cold winters "with the help of meats which they eat with much and excessively hot spices."[28]

A year later, another Italian in Spanish royal service, the humanist Pietro Martire d'Anghiera (1457–1526), sent a sample of the new hot spice, brought home by Columbus in the form of seeds, to the papal vice-chancellor, Ascanio Sforza (1455–1505); in the attached letter he called it "more pungent to the taste than Caucasian pepper," and warned the vice-chancellor to taste them "with caution; not that they are harmful, but they are very peppery, and if you leave them a long time in your mouth, they will sting the tongue. In case you should burn your tongue a little in tasting them, take some water, and the burning sensation will be allayed."[29] Apparently, Pietro Martire did not expect his correspondence partner to have been accustomed to particularly hot food.

This is how the "pepper" that has come to be known as *chili* (its name in Nahuatl) made its entrance into the Old World. By the end of the sixteenth century, it was apparently known and used almost everywhere in Europe. Fernandez de Oviedo (1478–1557), the governor of Santo Domingo at the time, wrote in the seventh book of his *Historia general y natural de las Indias* first published in 1535, that the *axi* or *pimienta de los indios* "is shipped to Spain and Italy, and other regions as a very good spice […] and merchants and other persons are sent for it from Europe, and they look for it eagerly for their own greed and appetite."[30] Similarly, Leonhart

[28] "[C]on la ayuda delas viandas que comen con especias muchas y muy calientes en demasia." Richard Henry Major (ed., trans.), *Select Letters of Christopher Columbus, with Other Original Documents, Relating to His Four Voyages to the New World* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1870), 13. My translation; Major translates it as "by eating meat with a variety of excessively hot spices."

[29] "Grana quaedam rugosa diversorum colorum Caucaseo pipere acutiora [...] [Si] ex granis [...] gustare volueris, illustrissime Princeps, tenuiter admoto labello, pertingito: sunt enim, quamvis non noxia, ob nimiam tamen caliditatis acuitatem, acria et linguam, si in ea diu morentur, expungunt; sed statim, si forte eius degustatione lingua concoquatur, epota aqua, asperitas illa tollitur." Pietro Martire d'Anghiera, *De orbe novo decades*, 2 vols., ed. Rosanna Mazzacane and Elisa Magioncalda (Genoa: Dipartimento di Archeologia, Filologia Classica e Loro Tradizioni, Università di Genova, 2005), decade 1, bk. 1, p. 49 and decade 1, bk. 2, p. 71–73. The quotations in the main text are taken from *De Orbe Novo: The Eight Decades of Peter Martyr D'Anghera*, trans. Francis Augustus MacNutt (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1912), 65 and 84. "Caucasian pepper" refers to regular pepper since according to Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* 12, 14 (trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library 370, [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 194], 19): "trees resembling our junipers that bear pepper occur everywhere [in India – O.G.], although some writers have reported that they only grow on the southern face of the Caucasus." Similarly, Isidor of Seville writes that pepper „grows in India on the side of Mount Caucasus exposed to the sun." *Etym.* 17, 8; quoted in Freedman, *Out of the East*, 133.

[30] "Llévasse á España é á Italia é á otras partes por muy buena especia [...] é desde Europa envian por ello mercaderes é otras personas, é lo buscan con diligencia para su propria gula é apetito." Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, *Historia general y natural de las Indias, islas y tierra-firme del mar océano*, ed. José Amador de los Rios, 4 vols. (Madrid: Imprenta de la Real Academia de la Historia, 1851–1855), bk. 7, ch. 7, vol. 1, p. 275.

Fuchs (1501–1566) observed in 1542 that "[i]t is found almost everywhere in Germany now, planted in clay pots and earthen vessels" and "many use this instead of true pepper."[31] His fellow German botanist, Hieronymus Bock (1498–1554), called it *Teütscher Pfeffer* already in 1539.[32] According to Bartolomé de las Casas (1484–1566), writing around 1552, it "is known in all of Spain [and] it counts as a healthy spice as stated by our physicians."[33] The Seville doctor and author of a very successful handbook of American plants, Nicolas Monardes (1493–1588), adds (in a contemporary English translation) that it "serueth not onely for Medicine, but it is otherwise most excellent, the which is knowen in all Spayne, for there is no Gardeyne, nor Orcharde, but that it hath plentie thereof in it."[34] Carolus Clusius (Charles de l'Écluse, 1526–1609), remembers "to have also seen it grown in the greatest abundance, in the 1585th year of Christ, in the suburban gardens of the famous city of Brno in the March of Moravia; and the farmers made a considerable profit from it, since the common people used it frequently."[35] A few years later it appears to have been ubiquitous in (Southern) Italy as well, as implied in the comment of the Neapolitan polymath, Giovanni Battista della Porta (1535–1615),

[31] "In Germania iam in fictilibus ac testaceis satum passim fere provenit. Perpaucis anteannis Germanis incognitum fuit. [...]. Valenter excalfacit atque desiccat, id quod seminis immensa acrimonia et foliorum amaritudo evidentissime monstrat, ut certe non temere plerique hoc semine loco veri Piperis utantur." Frederick G. Meyer, Emily E. Trueblood, and John L. Heller, *The Great Herbal of Leonhart Fuchs:* De historia stirpium commentarii insignes*, 1542 (Notable Commentaries on the History of Plants)*, 2 vols. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 1, 622 (English), 2,731 and 735 (Latin, with slightly different punctuation).

[32] Hieronymus Bock, *New kreütter Buch: Von vnderscheydt, würckung und namen der kreütter so in Teütschen landen wachsen* etc. (Strasbourg: Rihel, 1539), pt. 2, ch. 117, fol. 86v–87r.

[33] "[E]s en toda España conocida. Tiénese por especia sana, según acá dicen nuestros medicos." Quoted in Janet Long-Solis, *Capsicum y cultura: La historia del chilli* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económico, 1986), 34.

[34] "[N]o solo sirve a medicina, pero es excelentissima, la qual es conocida en toda España, porque no ay jardin, ni huerta, ni maceton que no la tenga sembrada." Nicolas Monardes, *Primera y segunda y tercera partes de la Historia medicinal de las cosas que se traen de nuestras Indias Occidentales que sirven en Medicine* etc. (Seville: Escrivano, 1574), fol. 24v translated as *Ioyfull newes out of the newfound world wherein are declared the rare and singular vertues of diuers and sundrie herbs, trees, oyles, plants, [and] stones* etc., by John Frampton (London: Norton, 1580 [1577]), fol. 20r–v. Clusius confirms its widespread use in Spain on the basis of his own observations as well: "Piper igitur Americanum diligentissime coli observabam, dum per Hispaniam peregrinabar anno Christi millesimo quingentesimo, sexagesimo quarto, in multis eius Regni provinciis, praesertim vero tota Castella vetere et nova, cum ab hortulanis, tum a mulieribus in aedium suarum pensilibus hortis; etenim per totum annum eo utebantur recente et sicco pro condimento in cibis." Carolus Clusius, *Curae posteriores, seu plurimarum non ante cognitarum aut descriptarum stirpium, peregrinorumque aliquot animalium novae descriptiones* (Leiden: Raphelengius, 1611), 54. See also Rebecca Earle, *The Body of the Conquistador: Food, Race and the Colonial Experience in Spanish America, 1492–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 137–38.

[35] "Memini etiam videre anno Christi M. D. XXCV. maxima copia cultum in suburbanis Brunnae celebris Marchionatus Moraviae urbis hortis, e quo cultores non contemnendum quaestum faciebant; erat enim apud vulgus frequens eius usus." Clusius, *Curae posteriores,* 54.

that "we plant and cultivate it in our gardens and in pots both for its visual appeal and for cooking."[36]

Clusius' comment on the social status of its consumers will be of interest for us later on, but now it is worth coming back to the problem of how the pungency of the chili was initially perceived. We have seen that for Colombus the spices used by the American natives were "excessively hot," and that Pietro Martire warned Ascanio Sforza to taste chili seed with due caution. A century later, a Capuchin friar, a certain Fra Gregorio da Reggio, who became the main chili expert of the period growing 25 different types in the Bolognese convent of his order, described a method of how to make red pepper less hot:

> This pepper was not merely not used as a medication but it was not added to food either, because of the outstanding pungency that comes with it. Nonetheless, human talent has apparently found a method through which its defectiveness can be amended, so that it could be put to use without any inconvenience as a condiment of food, and also applied as a medication if prepared in the following way: we pick the ripen hulls or pods of this pepper with the stems on and dry them in the shade; when we want to utilize them, we put them with flour in a vessel similar to the one used by apothecaries for drying almonds and pine nuts to be coated with sugar, and slowly dry them on the fire; then we clean off the flour, and remove the stems; then, with a pincer, we cut them in small pieces and weigh them together with the seeds, and add to each ounce of pods and seeds one pound of finely ground flour, knead the whole together with yeast in the manner of bread, and leave the dough to leaven; when it is leavened well, we bake it in the oven; if set, we cut them in slices, and bake them again in the manner of toasts; finally, we pound them in a copper or other kind of mortar and let them through a sieve.[37]

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[36] "Nos hortis nostris, et vasculis, tum plantae spectaculo, tum culinis, eam serimus, et colimus." Giovanni Battista della Porta, *Villae libri XII* (Frankfurt a M.: Wechel, 1592), bk.10, ch. 51, p. 714. Vito Teti goes out of his way to show that chili appears in the works of the Calabrian philosopher Tommaso Campanella but it does not seem sure for me that what is meant by him is chili pepper indeed, and not just the regular one. See Teti, *Storia del pepperoncino*, ch. 5.

[37] "Non modo in medicamenti usum receptum non erat hoc piper, sed neque in cibum etiam admittebatur, propter insignem illam acrimoniam qua praeditum est. Nihilominus videtur humanum ingenium rationem invenisse qua eius malignitas corrigeretur, ut in usum recipi posset sine ullo incommodo ad cibos condiendum, atque etiam pro medicamento usurpati, hoc modo preparatum: maturae huius piperis vesicae sive siliquae leguntur cum suis pediculis, et in umbra siccantur; quando quis uti volet, reponat in vase illi simili quo utuntur pharmacopolae ad resiccandos amygdalarum et nucis pinae nucleos quos saccharo operire volunt, cum farina, et exsiccet lento igne; deinde a farina purgentur, et a pediculis suis liberentur; deinde cum forcipe minutissime cum suis seminibus incisae ponderantur, atque singulis siliquarum cum semine unciis, pollinis farinae libra additur, pinsuntur simul omnia cum fermento panis instar, et fermentari haec massa sinitur; probe fermentata in clibano coquitur, cocta in taleas scinditur, et denuo coquitur, instar biscocti; postremo in aheneo mortario aut alio tenuissime teritur et per cribrum transmittitur." Fra

Independently of Fra Gregioro, and in much less detail, the Roman doctor and botanist, Castore Durante (1529–1590), writing around 1585, also described the same method:

> It is used in all condiments of food because its taste is better than that of regular pepper; and in order to make it more enjoyable, its pods are pounded together with the seeds, added to a dough and prepared as toasts, which mixed with the usual spices enhances their flavor pretty well."[38]

Interestingly enough, in the sixteenth century, I found this method in Italy alone.[39] Others either did not portray chili as excessively hot, or they did but also regarded it as poisonous. Spanish authors – including Fernandez de Oviedo and Monardes – are in the first group while northerners – like the Flemish physician and botanist Rembert Dodoens (1517–1585), his German colleague, Joachim Camerarius the Younger (1534–1598), or the English herbalist, John Gerarde (1545–1612) – are in the second.[40] Some of the northerners saw Spain as the place of Europe where it was typically eaten in spite of its supposedly unhealthy character. According to Gerarde, for example,

> in Spaine and sundrie parts of the Indies they do use to dresse their meate therewith, as we do with Calecute pepper [i.e. regular pepper – O.G.]: but

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Gregorio had sent his work to Clusius and it was published in the latter's *Curae posteriores* on pp. 50–57; the quotation is from p. 56.

[38] "Si usa in tutti i condimenti de i cibi, perche è di miglior gusto, che il pepe comune, e per farlo più piacevole, si pestano le sue guaine insieme col seme, e s'incorporano con pasta, e se ne fa pan biscotto, il quale accompagnato con le spetie communi le moltiplica con non ingrato sapore." Castore Durante, *Herbario nuovo di Castore Durante medico e cittadino romano con figure che rappresentano le vive piante, che nascono in tutta Europa, e nell'Indie Orientali e Occidentali* etc. (Rome: Iacomo Bericchia and Iacomo Tornierij, 1585), 344.

[39] It does pop up, however, in late eighteenth-century Hungary: "Some also grind it and, kneaded together with flour, bake it like a bread, which they use for flavoring." ("Némellyek porrá törve és lisztel egybe-gyúrva kenyérnek-is sütik, mellyel azután bors hellyett füszerszámoznak"). István Mátyus, *Ó és Új diaetetica az az: az életnek és egésségnek fenn-tartására és gyámolgatására, Istentől adattatott nevezetesebb természeti eszközöknek való elszámlálása.* [Old and new dietetics, or an account of the most notable natural means given by God for sustaining and safeguarding life and health] 6 vols (Bratislava: Landerer, 1787–1793), vol. 4, 339. The use of chili (*paprika*) as a condiment in Hungary is not attested before the eighteenth century, even if the plant is known to have been grown already between the 1570s and 1590 in the garden of Boldizsár Batthyány at Stadtschlaining/Szalónak in modern-day Austria; see Dóra Bobory, *The Sword and the Crucible: Count Boldizsár Batthyány and Natural Philosophy in Sixteenth-Century Hungary* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 98–99.

[40] See Rembert Dodoens, *Stirpium historiae pemptades sex, sive libri XXX* (Antwerp: Plantin, 1583), 705; Camerarius in Pietro Andrea Mattioli and Joachim Camerarius, *De plantis epitome utilissima Petri Andreae Matthioli Senensis […]. Novis iconibus et descriptionibus pluribus nunc primum diligenter aucta a D. Ioachimo Camerario, medico inclytae Reipublicae Noribergensis* (Frankfurt am Main: Feyerabend, 1586), 348; John Gerarde, *The Herball or Generall Historie of Plantes* (London: Norton, 1597), 293.

> (saith my author [i.e. Dodoens]) it hath in it malitious qualitie, whereby it is an enimie to the liver and other of the entrails.[41]

The idea of regarding chili as poisonous was based on its identification with *Zingiber caninum* which is said to kill dogs in Avicenna's *Canon*.[42] This identification we do not find in the above mentioned Spanish or Italian authors, not because they did not know their Avicenna, but because they probably knew their chili consumed more frequently around them. According to Monardes, it is

> used in al manner of meates and pottages, for that it hath better tast then the common Peper hath. Beaten in peeces, and cast into broth it is an excellent sauce, they doe use it in al thinges that the aromatike spices are used in, which are brought from Maluco, and Calicut. It doeth differ from that of the East Indias, for that costeth many ducates, and this other doth cost no more but to sowe it, for that in one plant you have spice for one whole yere, with lesse hurte and more profite."[43]

In other words, it is not only better than regular pepper but it is also more economical. It is something you are supposed to eat only for its culinary and medical qualities not being suitable for showing off. That chili, in spite of the enthusiasm surrounding it, never made it to early modern Spanish cookbooks,[44] confirms the latter point.

This brings us back to Clusius' comment on the chili pepper cultivated in Brno: "the common people used it frequently." His account is corroborated by the protestant parson and author, Johannes Coler, who saw it sold a few years before 1596 in Frankfurt a. d. Oder for four silver groats (*Groschen*) a pound, that is much less than regular pepper which came for at least sixteen groats a pound, and reported that "the simple folk regards it as their best pepper."[45] Monardes, by contrast,

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[41] Gerarde, *The Herball*, 293; see also Iacobus Theodorus Tabernaemontanus, Hieronymus Bauhin, and Caspar Bauhin, *Iacobi Theodori Tabernaemontani New vollkommen Kräuter-Buch [...]. Vormahls durch D. Casparum Bauhinum [...] gebesseret. Jetzt widerumb auffs newe übersehen [...] durch Hieronymum Bauhinum* etc. (Basel: König and Werenfels, 1664), 1242–43.

[42] Avicenna, *Canon medicinae*, 5 vols. (Venice: Pierre Maufer, 1486), bk. 2, tract 2, ch. 748 (without continuous foliation).

[43] Monardes, *Ioyfull newes*, fol. 20v. Probably the same is implied in Della Porta's assertion that "[p]iperis vice, quod ex India nobis defertur, herbae cuiusdam siliquis, et granis, quod suo piperis gustu iura commendet, quam saepissime utimur." Della Porta, *Villae*, 714.

[44] Jeanne Allard, "Les produits des «Indes Occidentales» dans la cuisine espagnole au siècle d'Or," in *Des Indes Occidentales à l'Amérique Latine*, ed. Thomas Calvo and Alain Musset (Lyon: ENS Éditions, 1997), 137–42 at 139–40.

[45] "Ein Pfund Pfeffer umb sechzehen Groschen oder ein halben Taler, wenn er gans ist. [...] Ich hab auch zu Franckfurt an der Oder eine art des Pfeffers gesehen [...] den nennen sie auch Türckischen Pfeffer; [...] wird das Pfund umb 4 silber Groschen, oder 1 Ortstaler geben; das halten einfeltige Leute vor Iren besten Pfeffer." Johannnes Coler, *Oeconomia oder Hausbuch: Zum Calendario oeconomico et perpetuo gehörig*, 6 vols. (Wittenberg: Hellwig, 1593–1601), vol. (pt.) 3, bk. 9, ch. 34 (with slightly different punctuation, without page numbers). Cf. Kőszegi, "A paprika útjai," 266–67.

plainly did not belong to, and his audience hardly consisted of members of the "common people" or the "simple folk," and the consumers he is talking about are just Spaniards without further qualification in terms of social status. His enthusiasm for the chili was shared by those who came to know it in America. According to Fernandez de Oviedo "Christians do not like it less, and are no less devoted to it than the Indians […] and to tell the truth, the *ají* is better with meat and fish than the best pepper."[46] Similarly, Cervantes de Salazar also affirms in his *Chronicle* that in America the "Spaniards use it no less than the Indians."[47] Knowledge of and taste for chili pepper were surely transmitted by Spaniards from America to their relatives and acquaintances back home much before the publication of such learned accounts. Relation of personal experience must have played a part in making the allegedly poisonous character of chili difficult to believe and its diffusion not limited to the lower echelons of society most sensitive to the price of spices.

In Northern Europe, on the other hand, potential consumers of higher status were much less connected to sources of first-hand information. Indeed, many of them thought that chili had come from India (where, as a matter of fact, it had been introduced by the Portuguese). Matthias de L'Obel (Lobelius) and his assistant, Pierre Pena, wrote in 1571 that "this very beautiful plant started to be imported to Europe from Goa and the shores of Calicut in our times."[48] According to Fuchs, "[i]n German it is called *Chalechutischer* or *Indianischer Pfeffer*."[49] It may well be the case that the merchants from all over Europe mentioned by Fernandez de Oviedo spread the chili first among the poor of the North as a cheap substitute for pepper and the botanists like Fuchs encountered it first in this capacity. In Germany, chili could apparently be sold better if masked as regular pepper. "Some of our merchants and spice sellers, who are so much after the penny," writes Hieronymus Bock,

> know how to retail bastard pepper, which lacks all pungency and taste, efficiently, since they pound and mix seeds of the new hot German pepper

[46] "[N]o es menos agradable a los cristianos, ni hacen menos por ello que los indios [...] y en la verdad, el ají es mejor con la carne e con el pescado que la muy buena pimiento." Fernández de Oviedo, *Historia general*, 1: 275–76.

[47] "El agí sirve de especia en estas partes; […] es apetitoso, y de manera que los más guisados y salsas se hacen con él; usan dél no menos los españoles que los indios." Francisco Cervantes de Salazar, *Crónica de la Nueva España*, [ed. Manuel Magallón] (Madrid: The Hispanic Society of America, 1914), bk. 1., ch. 6, p. 15.

[48] "Coepit nostra memoria ista perpulchra planta adferri ex Goa, et Calecutiis oris in Europam." Matthias de L'Obel and Pierre Pena, *Stirpium adversaria nova: Perfacilis vestigatio, luculentaque accessio ad priscorum, praesertim Dioscoridis et recentiorum materiam medicam* etc. (London: Thomas Purfoot, 1571), 134.

[49] "Germanice dici potest *Chalechutischer oder Indianischer Pfeffer*." Meyer, Trueblood, and Heller, *The Great Herbal of Leonhart Fuchs*, vol. 1, 621 and vol. 2, 731. The chili arrived in Goa in the first half of the sixteenth century under the name "Pernambuco pepper" which refers to the Brazilian context where the Portuguese had become familiar with it; see Mazumdar, "The Impact of New World Food Crops," 60–61.

> (which we [Bock, or the botanists in general – O.G.] call *Siliquastrum* and *Zinziber caninum*) with the feeble tasteless bastard pepper, which they call among themselves "refuse", whereupon this pepper, feeble in itself, becomes rather hot and piquant, and they sell and distribute it as pepper of the highest quality.[50]

The account implies that this fake pepper *could* be sold as pepper of the highest quality, which suggests that many of the consumers were far from being pepper connoisseurs and what mattered to them was pungency and prestige. "German pepper" apparently failed to have the latter quality, while regular pepper continued to enjoy it since – as we have seen above – most of its import targeted Central and Northern Europe.

Conclusion

Having soon become a cheap domestic product all over Europe, chili pepper could not attempt to dethrone regular pepper as a new luxury like grains of paradise did in the elite cuisine of fifteenth-century France. But it was not entirely relegated to the status of a cheap and despised substitute either. In Spain, and partly in Italy, probably because of the personally related experiences of compatriots in America, it was regarded by many as genuinely better than regular pepper. It was neither trickling down from above nor creeping up from below. It spread as a socially rather undifferentiated condiment. In Central and Northern Europe, on the other hand, it emerged as a spice of the "common people" or the "simple folk."

Such a North–South difference in the reception of the chili is not necessarily the consequence of comparable differences in medieval taste. It could be argued (rather tentatively, of course) that Northern and Central Europeans were more into regular pepper than others in the sixteenth century because they had less of it in the Middle Ages due to higher prices. But it seems that chili became widely accepted not in those areas where regular pepper reigned supreme. Should we assume, on the other hand, that those who had (or could have had) more pepper in the Middle Ages were more accustomed or even more attracted to exceptional

[50] "[U]nsere kauffleüt unnd wurtzkremer zům theil, die dem pfennig so hart nach stellen, wissen den Basthart Pfeffer, welcher on alle scherpffe und geschmack ist, wol zůvertreiben, ursach sie stossen und mischen den newen hitzigen Teütschen pfeffer samen (den wir Siliquastrum unnd Zinziber caninum nennen) under den toerichten ongeschmackten Basthart pfeffer, welchen sie bei inen Gerbelier nennen, als dann würt der selbig toericht pfeffer ganz hitzig unnd zanger, und für den aller besten pfeffer verkaufft und vertreiben." Hieronymus Bock, *Teütsche speiszkammer: Inn welcher du findest was gesunden unnd krancken menschen […] zur Kost und artznei gereichet werden sollen* (Strasbourg: Rihel, 1550), fol. 95r. For contemporary debates around the spice trade and its supposed moral and economic impact in Germany, see Christine R. Johnson, *The German Discovery of the World: Renaissance Encounters with the Strange and Marvelous* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 123–65.

pungency than those who had less of it, we cannot account for the fact that all early commentators from Italy found the chili excessively hot.

Moreover, if we try to go beyond the realm of the tentative and the hypothetical, tendencies in medieval taste for pungent spices are quite difficult to reconstruct, as we have seen above. And even if the consumption of high quantities had been true, the food of medieval elite groups was not an early variant of Tex-Mex. "Contemporary Italian or European food," write Alberto Capatti and Massimo Montanari about the late twentieth century,

> has a predominantly analytical character, which means that it tends to distinguish between flavors (sweet, salty, tart, sour, or spicy), reserving a separate place for each, both in individual dishes and in the order of courses served at a meal. Linked to this practice is the notion that the cook should respect as much as possible the natural flavor of each food: a flavor that is distinct and different and should be kept separate from other flavors [...] Renaissance cuisine, like that of the Middle Ages or – to go back further – the cuisine of ancient Rome, had developed a model of cooking based mainly on the concept of artifice and the mixture of flavors. Here the preparation of individual dishes and their presentation at various points throughout the meal disclose a synthetic rather than an analytical logic: in other words, the tendency to keep things together rather than to separate them.[51]

On this account, modern western (*hautes) cuisines* are analytic rather than synthetic, while medieval *hautes cuisines* were synthetic but not necessarily spicy in the modern sense. Even if adding hot sauces like Tabasco to any savory dish has the consequence of leveling tastes, the analytic character of modern cooking can be detected even here as these condiments have relatively few ingredients. Their flavour mainly depends on the type and quality of red pepper used for making them. Among sixteenth-century writers it is only Castore Durante who explicitly recommends using chili pepper together with the traditional spices. Others seem to refer to using it in ways that deny the synthetic taste of medieval cuisine, as *the* spice of the meal. In this sense, even if its journey to mainstream European taste lasted for centuries, the early appreciation of chili in southern Europe was more a harbinger of (post)modern food-ways than a reflection of medieval ones.

[51] Alberto Capatti and Massimo Montanari, *Italian Cuisine: A Cultural History*, trans. Áine O'Healy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 86–87.